

Meet the Sin Doctor

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Preacher: Robbie Laidlaw

[0 : 0 0] 2, and you can find it on page 1003 of the Church Bibles. That's Mark chapter 2, beginning at verse 1.

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it, and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, Son, your sins are forgiven. Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, why are you thinking these things? Which is easier?

To say to this paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up, take your mat, and walk. But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

So he said to the man, I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home. He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this. Once again, Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, Jesus told him. And Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? On hearing this, Jesus said to them, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Thanks, Andy, for reading for us. I used to always wonder what it would be like to live somewhere like Rome or Paris or these kind of famous places, places that are drenched in history.

[3 : 1 6] Imagine walking around every day seeing St. Peter's Basilica dominate the skyline, or seeing the Colosseum as you sit and enjoy an Aperol spritz, smelling fresh pizza everywhere you go. It's the dream.

But I've come to since realize that actually I think I'd get used to that pretty quickly, and it would become pretty boring. We live in the West End of Glasgow. I first moved about four years ago, and I used to love walking around the uni and the whole West End, seeing the old buildings, seeing, you know, one of the oldest English universities in the world.

You'd walk through the cloisters imagining all the people that came here before. I think by week four, I hated climbing University Avenue. I hated walking around, and I just didn't really pay attention to the wondrous things that were near me. The spectacular becomes the standard in every part of our life when we get used to it. It might even have happened to you as we were reading this passage. The story Andy just read for us is from Mark's Gospel, one of the stories of Jesus' life. If you've been a Christian for a long time, my bet is you've heard that story many times. It's a classic in the Sunday school diet. I want us to see tonight that actually in what we've just read is the spectacular, not just the standards. This passage, when we read it, should shock us and surprise us, maybe even confuse us. Maybe you've never read this story before.

Maybe what we read tonight is completely new to you. Well, if that is true, then you're in it for an absolute treat. Whatever your experience is with the Bible, this story is exciting. It's unexpected. It packs a real punch. So I want all of us, as we work through this passage together, to experience this story afresh. Let's let the spectacular nature of Jesus be spectacular and not the standard we know this story as from Sunday school. So let me pray before we dig in that the Lord would help us see that way. Lord, we ask that you'd open our eyes tonight to see the spectacular truths about Jesus. Help us to see you clearly and correctly. Whether we've never read this before or we've read it every day for decades, deepen our understanding of your word and who you are. Father, help us to see Jesus' words and works as spectacular. Amen. Jesus has been traveling through the wilderness in Galilee for a few days now. Galilee's an area in Israel, which is the country where Jesus lived. He's been preaching and driving out demons. That's what we saw in last week's reading. And after a few days tonight, we see that he returns to Capernaum, the town he was in previously. And all of a sudden, the widespread fame that's been following Jesus causes a bit of a problem. You see, Jesus' preaching and healings has earned him fame and huge crowds of followers.

And it reaches a claustrophobic peak here. As Jesus goes to preach and teach to the people of Capernaum, the room he is in is suddenly crammed full. It's rammed so busy that no one can walk in the door. Imagine the subway at 8.45 in the morning. You're trying to get to work and all of a sudden, you're not going near that. You can't even squish in if you tried.

[6 : 32] Now imagine really wanting to hear Jesus speak and being on the outside. You'd be feeling like you'd missed out. This great teacher is inside and he's talking and he's doing things and everyone's talking about him for, they've been talking about him for weeks, but you can't see it.

Now imagine that you're outside of it. You can't get in, but actually you didn't just want to hear him speak. You wanted to see him heal someone. Imagine that that someone is actually one of your best friends. That's the situation that a group of men find themselves in tonight. They have a paralyzed man who's on a mat before them. They want to take him to Jesus so Jesus can heal him because that's what Jesus has been doing for everyone. They're sure that if they can get this man before Jesus, Jesus can help him walk. Jesus could heal him. They're so confident in Jesus's power and so desperate to get this man before Jesus that they decide they're going to take matters into their own hands.

So they climb up onto the roof of this house. They carry the paralyzed man on his mat up with them. They get onto the roof, they lay him down and they think, well, the only way is down. And so they start digging. They start causing a hole in the roof. I don't know if they had hammers. I don't know if these are your hands just stuck a foot through. I don't know. But they worked whatever they had to get in. The goal of these men is unbelievable. If it was me, I'd have seen, lucky mate. Better luck next time. Maybe Jesus will be more free in a few weeks. Maybe next time he's back. But not these men.

They are so sure that Jesus will fix their friend's problem that they would willingly destroy a stranger's house. They get in there and he's, and they make the whole, you can imagine being inside this ancient Israelite home. I can't imagine it was very big or particularly luxurious as to what we're used to now. But you can imagine just the dust falling on your head. All of a sudden people start looking up trying to see what's happening. And a little pinprick of light comes through. And all of a sudden, boom, the roof caves in. The sun lights through. And as everybody looks up, they just see four guys' heads poking over. It would be literally unbelievable if you're in there like, what are these men doing? And all of a sudden it's not just four faces you see in this hole. It's a man being lowered down. This room that is crammed full all of a sudden needs to find room for one man.

You can imagine the inhalation of the, oh, what's happening as he gets lowered down? And then sudden silence as everyone waits and goes, well, that man's paralyzed. What's Jesus going to do? What is Jesus going to do? The crowd hold their breath until Jesus looks at the man and says, son, your sins are forgiven.

[9 : 21] What? That doesn't make sense. That's not how you heal someone. What's this all about? Sins being forgiven. The man can't walk. The crowd, you can almost hear the audible, huh, from everyone who's watching. It's such a strange reaction from Jesus. That's not what we expect Jesus to do. The other strange thing about this passage is that the reason Jesus speaks is because he sees the faith of the friends. Look with me down to, oh, it's getting the right page. It's in verse five. When Jesus saw their faith, the man's friends, he said to the paralyzed man, son, your sins are forgiven.

That's strange. It's not the man's faith. It's his friends. Faith is a word we use a lot, and we can use it a lot of different ways. Faith in the Bible is an action. It's a doing word. These four men believed that Jesus could heal, so took the man to Jesus, and that is faith. They trusted, believed, and acted. And because they had this faith, Jesus spoke those words, son, your sins are forgiven.

He doesn't heal him. He forgives him. If you ask the paralyzed man why he was wanting to go to Jesus, I imagine he'd say, Jesus could make me walk. And if I can walk, well, I could get a job. If I get a job, I could get a home. I'd be off the streets. I wouldn't have to beg anymore. It'd be amazing if only Jesus can help me walk. My problems would be solved.

Jesus shows us that actually there's a slightly different view of the problem that this man had. The problem that Jesus identifies is not a physical ailment with this man. The issue is not that he cannot walk, but he has a spiritual problem. The biggest problem clearly in this man's life is sin.

Sin is another Bible word. In the Bible, if you don't know what sin is, it's a problem that every single person in mankind has ever faced. Sin is a total rejection of God and all his ways.

[11 : 26] It's an internal sickness that we all have. We can't see it. There's no visible evidence of sin in your life. There's no sinometer that kind of goes above every head that kind of goes from good person to the absolute horrendous person. Instead, the Bible just tells us that everyone is a sinner. And that is a problem. That is the problem we all face. Sin is the thing that keeps us away from God and the life we were created to live with him. So Jesus, in this story, in this episode from his life, doesn't deal with the current physical problem that this man faces. Rather, Jesus solves his eternal spiritual problem. By forgiving this man's sins, this man can return to God.

If Jesus left him there with just forgiven sins, all of the man's greatest problems in his whole life will have been solved. He'll get to heaven. He'll get to be reunited with God as was meant to be.

Everyone in the house must have been very confused. We see that in the response of the teachers of the law. These men would have been the religious leaders of the day. You know, they're in charge of the synagogue. They're in charge of making sure people followed the law and make sure they renew the law as well. Look at verse 7. These teachers of the law ask, why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? And they bring up a good point, you know, like the only person who can forgive sins is God himself. They're not wrong in saying that. So how could this man, how could this man Jesus claim to forgive sins? Well, there are two possibilities here according to this claim. The first is that Jesus couldn't forgive sins. He's a liar, a fraud, and a blasphemer. He's insulting God and rejecting him in his words. That's one option. Or the second option is that Jesus can forgive sins. And if he can forgive sins, well, that means Jesus is from God himself.

Jesus knows what they were thinking in their hearts. Isn't that incredible? Jesus knew in his spirit what these men were thinking before they even said it. The teachers of the law are sitting quietly just watching what's going on, and Jesus draws them into conversation so he can prove that what he said is true. The funny bit in the story, we always remember the story of the paralyzed man as being about the paralyzed man being able to walk again. But in actuality, for the majority of this experience, the paralyzed man is lying on the grounds, and Jesus is talking to a different group of men.

That tells us that the important thing here is not the paralyzed man being healed. It's what Jesus is claiming about himself. Jesus takes this chance to talk to the teacher of the law and prove that what he says is true. He asks a simple question. What is easier to say, son, your sins are forgiven, or get up, take your mat, and go home? I think the answer is simple. Jesus is saying which of these words is more obviously true. I could say, your sins are forgiven. I could tell you all that right now. I forgive your sins, and none of you would know if I did it or not. There's no sinometer. It doesn't go from sinner to righteous, like, done, cool, thank you very much. But if I said to someone who couldn't walk, get up and walk, you'd be able to tell that I was a liar. There's no way I could fake that. Jesus has come so you could prove who he is and what he's come. Let's look at verse 9.

[15 : 02] I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the man, I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home. He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this.

Jesus wants the teachers and ever in this room to know who he is and what he can do. Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, and as the teacher says, only God can do that.

God has given the authority to the Son whom he loves to forgive the sins of the people around him on earth. The problem Jesus has come to fix is not physical, but spiritual. The difficulty about that for all of us is that it is not a visible problem.

We don't have a way to see that our sins have been forgiven. If we had that sinometer, it would make being a Christian a lot easier. Jesus forgives us, it'll go down to zero, and we'll always see it at zero, so bingo, that's us. But we don't have it that easy. We can't see forgiveness. And what we can see is our sin and the way we live and how we often reject God or don't live the way he wants us. Lack of assurance is one of the hardest things to overcome in the Christian faith. It's an uncertainty of whether you are actually forgiven, whether you're actually a Christian. So if you struggle to believe that you are forgiven, well, hear this story.

See, the proof Jesus gives of his ability to forgive, the things he says, the words he speaks, come true. When Jesus said, get up and walk, the paralyzed man got up and walked.

[16 : 50] When Jesus says, your sins are forgiven, your sins are forgiven. The real problem our entire world faces is the sickness of sin. It goes to the very heart of each and every man and woman. In fact, every part of our lives and sin, we have no power to stop it.

The sin sickness leaves a price that needs to be paid. In order for sins to be fully forgiven, that price, that punishment for sin, for rejection of God, it needs paid. Whilst Jesus said to the man, your sins are forgiven, the place where sins are forgiven is on the cross. When Jesus died in the man's place and in all of our place, it was the faith of the men that lead to Jesus forgiving.

It's all about faith and it's still about faith today. Faith is belief in action. Faith is trusting what Jesus has done, living our lives according to that truth. Faith is praying to God, asking for his saving power to forgive you of sins because you see Jesus for who he really is, the perfect king come to save. Faith is living counter-culturally in a world that doesn't agree with you, in a world that might hate you for what you think, but standing up and saying, what Jesus has done for me is worth it.

Faith is hearing God's word and his promises and living for him. The men didn't just wait around for something to happen. They didn't wait for Jesus to come and walk upon the paralyzed man. They went to him.

They believed and went to him. So if you believe, go to Jesus. He will forgive you. There is no doubt that when Jesus says something, it is true and it will happen.

[18 : 36] Sins are forgiven by Jesus, but it's not just the problem he deals with. Jesus cares for the sinners as well and that takes us to our second little episode tonight.

Once more, Jesus is by a lake teaching. A crowd gathers and he preaches before he calls a man called Levi, a tax collector. Immediately when Jesus says, come follow me, Levi gets up from his booth and follows him. If you've been around for the past few Sundays, as we've looked at Mark, this is probably ringing a few recollective bells. It's almost identical to Jesus calling Simon and Andrew and James and John. In that case, Jesus called four fishermen for workers from the small town to follow him. And if calling four fishermen to be his disciples was a bit strange at the time, then calling a tax collector to join this group is an absurd choice. You see, nobody likes the tax man.

Today, nobody likes the taxes. They take our money. And that's a bit of a problem. We want our money, but we at least, you know, and today we generally understand that when we're taxed, it goes towards something better. It goes towards healthcare, all these things. That wasn't the case in ancient Israel.

A slight annoyance between the Israelite and the tax collector wasn't what it was. It was disdain. It was hatred. A bit of context for that. Israelites lived in Israel, the promised land, the land God had given this people. They were meant to rule it and live in it under a king, but that didn't happen because in Jesus' time, the people in Israel were living under the Romans rule. The Roman Empire had conquered Israel and made it their own. And you see, the Romans really liked getting taxes from the people that they had conquered. But the way they did it wasn't by sending Romans to collect the taxes. No, they loved hiring local people to take the money of the people of their own country.

On top of that, their local tax collectors could take a bit of cream off the top, take a bit for themselves. Often, these tax collectors were greedy and conniving people with a penchant for making as much money as they could without thinking of their fellow countrymen. It was all about their own greeds. So in the eyes of Israel, to be a tax collector was to be a traitor. It was to work with the enemy. Tax collectors were totally rejected. I was even reading this week that in some Jewish writings, it said that anything a tax collector touched was ceremonially unclean. For some reason, Jesus calls Levi, a dirty, evil, traitorous tax collector. That's who Jesus wants to follow him.

[21 : 21] So Jesus calls Levi the tax collector, and Levi follows Jesus' authoritative summons, just like Simon, Andrew, James, and John. This time, again, they go to his house. They go to his house for tea.

But in this time, it isn't only Levi who has followed Jesus. Look at verse 15 with me. Who else is there? Many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. These are the kind of people who are following Jesus after they've heard his message.

The ones who are rejected by society. The tax collectors, the sinners. Earlier, I briefly explained what sin is, which is something that affects absolutely everyone. Well, here it's being used to talk about a very specific group of people. Sinners here is talking about the people who live by shady means. The tax collectors or the gamblers and the bookies, the loan sharks and the thugs.

That shady level of society that we would try and steer clear from if we think of ourselves as decent. They are the ones who welcome Jesus and whom Jesus welcomes. One commentator actually spreads this group wider. He says that some of the upstanding Jewish leaders would have thought of sinners to be anyone who couldn't act like the teachers of the law.

Anyone who couldn't live their life studying the law and living it out perfectly. Which means people, commoners or laborers, would come under that category because they had to work. They couldn't read the law all day.

[22 : 46] And it's at this point when we hear about the sinners and the tax collectors that the Pharisees get up here for the first time. Pharisees were a specific group of Jewish people. They taught the Torah, the Jewish leaders. They were like a specific group of teachers of the law. We often think of them as the baddies in the gospels, but at this point, we've only just met them. We don't know what they're actually like. We should think of them as upstanding citizens, as the religious people.

The Pharisees loved their law so much that they added in hundreds of new ones, and it made sure that they stayed clear of the dirty and unclean people because they wanted to be clean and righteous themselves. We see this kind of attitude in the Pharisees of a clean and unclean group of people in their response in verse 16. They ask the question, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Notice how they actually ask the disciples. They don't talk to Jesus himself.

They try and kind of curve from the outside, and the disciples don't have an answer because Jesus cuts in and says, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Jesus isn't here for people who think they are good enough, because that's what it means to be righteous, to think yourself good enough for God. The Pharisees had other laws. The teacher of the law kept them specifically so they could see themselves as righteous, so they could be clean.

And Jesus is making a big statement here. He's not come to give the Pharisees what they want or expect. He's not going to give them a pat on the back and say, well done, you've done everything we wanted you to.

[24 : 28] Instead, Jesus has come for the people they've rejected. This would offend the Pharisees and the teachers of the law massively, but for us, it's great news. Jesus has come so the spiritually sick can have access to a doctor. This changes everything. Jesus has come for sinners, not for the righteous.

That frees us. Here at church on Sundays, no longer do we have to pretend like everything is okay. There's no need to leave your sin at the door because you're here at church.

Rather, bring them in with you and give them to Jesus, because he is the only one who can deal with that. He's the only doctor who can deal with that sickness. He will forgive us freely if we come to him.

This changes how we talk to one another because we come together as a family aware that we are all sinners. And when we're aware that we are all sinners, we can remind one another of the grace Jesus has shown us.

We can remind one another that actually Jesus is still there waiting. There is no judgment from one another. We don't view our struggles with self-righteousness like, oh man, you're struggling with that thing.

[25 : 49] Better not come to church. It's the opposite. It means we can welcome sinners with open arms and we can love them and we can preach the truth to them because that is what Jesus would want. That is what the word says to do.

Our church is not one that is sin-free. We do not claim to be perfect people. We are all sinners. All of us make mistakes and are learning to grow in holiness and Christ-likeness as we go.

Sundays are a day when broken people gather together for restoration and forgiveness from the one person who can give it out. We don't think like the Pharisees and think some are sinners, but we as a sin-silence know we all are.

We are just as sick with sin as the next person. The difference is we believe in the sin doctor, Jesus Christ, and that he's come to heal us. What does a good doctor do?

A good doctor meets his patients, diagnoses the problem, and cures the disease. Tonight, we've seen Jesus meet with the patients. That is, the rejected by society, the sinners, the tax collectors, the people who could be far enough away from the righteous, upstanding society in Israel.

[27 : 08] That is everyone, though. The Bible tells us everyone is a sinner. Everyone is a patient for Jesus. So Jesus, as a good sin doctor, he diagnoses the real problem.

It is a sinful heart that is the issue we have. No physical ailments. No, nothing else. It is what is inside us, sin. The sickness that is in all mankind.

And even better, Jesus, the good sin doctor, cures that disease. He forgives us through the authority he was given by God the Father and proves it in his actions.

He forgives us through his death and proves it through his resurrection. He forgave through his word and proves it in his actions. Brothers and sisters, we are all sick.

So let's look to the only one who can heal us, the sin doctor, Jesus Christ. Let's pray together. Father God, thank you that you sent the sin doctor, Jesus Christ, to treat our sickness.

[28 : 14] Lord, open our eyes to the true need we have. The real problem in our lives is sin and nothing else. Thank you that Jesus has proven his ability to forgive. He has died for us and rose again to fill us with power to live for you every single day.

Remind us of that truth when we forget or the devil tries to convince us that we are not true Christians. You are so good to us. We thank you for all that you've done and all that Jesus has done.

Lord, we ask that we would feed upon you tonight in the communion and be strengthened for living for you this week. In your holy name, amen.